

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

We are the Community Messengers and are residents of the city of Bridgeport representing United Way of Coastal Fairfield County and Bridgeport Prospers. The Community Messengers are a mix of immigrants from various places around the world and U.S citizens who all have a common goal to ensure there is equitable access for all. We stand in support of HB 6616: "An Act Concerning Expansion of Husky Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status". Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we need. If Connecticut wants a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving and growing workforce that is ready to meet the needs of our future, Connecticut must ensure that these individuals up to age of 26 have access to health coverage. Healthcare is an individual right. It is very difficult to come from another country and realize how hard the system works. Immigrants come to this country with the hope to have a better quality of life. This bill is so important because it gives children that come into this country an opportunity to grow healthy, thrive, and live a quality of life that they came here for.

One of Bridgeport Prospers' focus is to develop children from cradle to career. We believe that access to opportunity starts at birth, and without access it is nearly impossible to achieve. The Community Messenger group started in 2005 under United Way in Bridgeport comprising of 12 individuals from all walks of life. There were many members who had come into this country to receive a better quality of life and also help give others access to quality. We have members from Puerto Rico, Philippines, Greece, and Poland just to name a few that have lived in Bridgeport for over 30 years. Most of our Community Messengers have professions working directly with the community in early and higher education, healthcare, and business. Pre-Pandemic it was very hard for some of our Messengers to receive quality care for either themselves or family members who recently entered into this country due to lack of access to healthcare. Learning to find a place that did not charge much or waiting until the last minute to go to the ER usually were the options for many families.

Many Immigrants don't see preventative care as an option, they truly see it as a luxury. Applying for services is not easy, because the system has guidelines that are so high that most immigrants don't even qualify for. Thankfully our community has been able to go to the doctor when they are sick and receive care, but also is faced with a bill for them to cover costs making it a burden on families. A lot of clinics in our city run off of a sliding scale basis making families who may not make much have to pay out of pocket for every doctor visit. We believe that everyone regardless of immigration status should have an opportunity to receive quality care and not have to worry. Passing this bill would ensure a quality start of life to children and young adults. We envision a world where everyone regardless of immigration status can have a chance to thrive and be successful by first having quality healthcare. It would help us work better with the community because they all would qualify for the healthcare services and help us provide better education around healthcare to the community. Our biggest goal is to help the community and provide resources that would benefit everyone.

We support HB 6616 and we ask the committee to support and pass this legislation out of committee in its current form - to expand HUSKY access to age 26. Our work does not end with expanding access up to age 12 nor with expanding access up to age 18. And that work must continue this year by expanding HUSKY access up to age 26. Looking forward, we ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time,

The Community Messengers